DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 462 SP 027 792

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TITLE Teachers' Contributions to School Improvement: Reflections on Fifteen Years of Research. R&D Report 3219.
INSTITUTION Texas Univ., Austin. Research and Development Center for Teacher Education.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (70th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Locus of Control; *Program Implementation; Teacher Influence; *Teacher Participation; Teacher Response; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Concerns Based Adoption Model

ABSTRACT

A report is given on findings of research studies on how teachers respond to attempts to implement educational innovations. In many cases, teachers believe their future in relation to the innovation is determined not by them, but by some superordinate. Other teacher responses may be the conviction that the change will soon fade away as other fads have or questioning the value of the change. Some teachers may also give the impression that they are using an innovation when, in fact, they are not. Researchers have concluded that teachers are most often the recipients rather than the initiators of any change affecting their classrooms and are therefore resistant to innovations. It is pointed out that although it is essential that teachers be receptive to change, when large numbers of participants are involved (as in a district-wide program), developing universal teacher ownership of the change is not possible. The effectiveness of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) in facilitating implementation of an innovation is discussed. The CBAM is a systematic plan for facilitating change that gives teachers priority consideration. (JD)

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(R&D Report 3219)

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

San Francisco, California

April 1986

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Teachers' Contributions to School Improvement: Reflections on Fifteen Years of Research

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For more than a decade the staff of the Research on Improvement project at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education (R&DCTE) has been intensively engaged in the study of the change process in school settings throughout the United States. It goes without saying that the process of change in schools cannot be studied in a meaningful way without attending to the role of teachers. The purpose of this paper is to present the findings and insights we have derived from our research that relates to the role of teachers in change. More specifically, the paper will address the issues of typical and possible teacher roles in the development, initiation and continuation of change.

Typical Roles of Teachers in Change

"I Don't Know" Syndrome

As one part of our research efforts we regularly assessed the way in which teachers were actually involved in the use of a particular innovation. To do this a focused interview format was used that permitted the determination of a particular Level of Use for each teacher (Hall, Loucks, Rutherford & Newlove, 1975; Loucks, Newlove and Hall, 1976). One question in this interview asks the teacher to project forward and tell how they see themselves being involved with the innovation in the future (or next year). The total number of Level of Use interviews we have conducted is estimated to be in the 1,000 range. Out of all of these interviews one answer frequently given in response to the question about future use is "I don't know, the (principal, supervisor, superintendent, or some other superordinate) has not yet told us." In some cases the response

is stated as a known, "The (name of superordinate) has said we will - - - ." In either case the message being conveyed by the teachers is that they believe their future in relation to the innovation is determined not by them, but by some superordinate. Many times they don't even know which superordinate or administrative level is responsible for making the decision about the innovation (Rutherford & Huling-Austin, 1984; Rutherford & Murphy, 1985).

This Too Shall Pass

Out of the many interviews and other data collection efforts directed by the R&DCTE researchers there has emerged another common teacher reaction to their involvement in the particular change. Teachers are reluctant to take any change too seriously or to invest in it too much energy for they know from experience that many innovations fade into oblivion after a few years or the importance of the innovation is diminished as other innovations are introduced.

This type of teacher reaction is certainly justified given the reality of how change is often handled by schools and school districts. It was not at all unusual to find teachers being asked to implement more than one innovation at the same time. Additionally, they might expect that each year they would be asked to implement at least one more change. If findings from research on change has taught us anything it is that teachers (or other persons for that matter) just cannot effectively implement these "rapid fire" innovations, particularly if they are at all complex (Rutherford, Hall & Huling, 1983; Hall, 1975; Hall, 1979). Changing an organization is a process that requires not just months but years to accomplish.

Given this nonsensical approach to change in schools it was understandable that teachers frequently did not treat the changes seriously. To maintain emotional and professional equilibrium it was necessary that they allocate their time and energies carefully and not overcommit to every passing fad. Thus, they often took the position that the change being promoted at any given

time would soon pass as many others before it had and, in fact, they were usually correct.

Why Change?

This was a question frequently asked by teachers who were being asked to make a change. As might be expected, one group asking this question was those teachers who were not accepting of the innovation. Until a year ago I would have said these were the resistors of change. However, a paper by Menlo (1985) has caused me to rethink that position. He holds that humans actually seek change, but what they resist is loss. If they perceive that by making the change they might suffer losses of a personal or material nature then they will resist the loss. Whether it be resistance to loss or resistance to change, there are those teachers who question change because they do not wish to participate in it.

There is another group of teachers who ask the question because they really wish to understand "why the change." A sixth-grade teacher is asked to implement a new criterion-referenced math program. Every year for the past 5 years her students have scored an average of two years above the district average on standardized math achievement tests. This teacher wants to know what is wrong with her math instruction that requires that she change to a new program. High School A is consistently ranked as one of the best in the state and has even earned national recognition. When the teachers are asked to implement a new instructional process patterned after Madeline Hunter's model, they ask what is wrong with their instruction now and how will the new model improve it. It would be encouraging if we could report that the group of teachers who do this kind of frank and professional questioning was quite sizeable. Unfortunately, it was not as large as the resistor group or maybe it just was not as vocal.

Let's Fake It

In this group of teachers are some who do not fit into any of the previously described groups, but many also belong to one (or more) of the above groups. The teachers in this group try to make it appear that they are doing what the innovation and its facilitators expect them to do. This does not mean that they are weak or dishonest teachers. Indeed some of the best teachers may be in this group. Teachers who are willing to try new ideas and programs that might improve their teaching and who want to do what is expected of them may find that the demands of multiple innovations prevent them from executing each innovation as well as they would like. Thus, they try to do or make ~~do as best~~ they can. Perhaps it is too harsh to say these teachers are faking it, but to be sure, their use of the innovation is less than genuine.

A subgroup within this group is characterized by their propensity for fitting anything new into an existing mold. They will claim there is nothing really new in this innovation; a new name has been given to something they have done for years (or used to do years ago). Not only do they claim this but they actually reshape the innovation so that as much as possible it does fit with what they have been doing all along. In this way they claim to be using the innovation when actually they are not,or only minimally.

There remains one small but fiesty group that is quite candid about their cover-up. For example, one teacher had her classroom fully adorned with all the visible trappings of the innovation. When asked about her use of the innovation she said she did not use it at all; she had simply prepared her room to make others believe she did. Others were not so clever in their deception, but they would admit to the researchers that they did only what was necessary to make it appear they were using the innovation.

The Sad Truth

From this brief and selected information one might draw many conclusions about the current and typical role of teachers in the process of educational change. The one conclusion that was most vivid to the researchers, both from data (Rutherford & Murphy, 1985) and subjective impression was that teachers are far more likely to be the recipients than the initiators of any change that impacts more than their own classrooms. When recipients of change had little or no input in the change process, and when change was thrust upon them with little forewarning, some resisted and some reacted positively, but the majority responded with a kind of passive acceptance that this is just the way things are done in schools.

Because change is managed in this way, and because teachers respond as they do (in a rational, logical way), the cost and loss for American education has been massive. Billions of dollars have been spent developing, disseminating and implementing programs that have vanished without a trace. In most cases it was never known whether the programs were effective or ineffective because they were implemented so poorly there was never a fair assessment of the innovation before it was set aside for another new program.

But there has been more than a loss of money. The improvement of schools and schooling, which is the ultimate objective of educational change, has actually been impaired. As teachers have been faced with wave after wave of changes they have developed the response patterns described above. For those teachers who have experienced this for some years it is increasingly difficult for them to take seriously any new program that is proposed. It is a credit to teachers that they try as they do to be responsive to each innovation.

Not only has teacher motivation and excitement for change been blunted, the great amounts of time and energy the multiple changes have required of them has destabilized their movement toward true teaching improvement. Our research

has established that as teachers first confront an innovation they usually have high personal concerns and concerns about how to manage the change (Hall & Rutherford, 1976; Hall, 1976). Although these concerns are typical when faced with something new, they do direct the teacher away from concerns that are more critical to teacher effectiveness, concerns about how to improve student learning.

Our research has also shown that when teachers attempt to use a new program it usually takes quite a while--perhaps several years--before they can use it effectively (Hall, 1978; Loucks & Hall, 1979; Hall, 1979). This means that during this time the teacher's effectiveness is reduced, and for a teacher who has to engage in one innovation after another, it means a continued reduction of effectiveness.

A third and often overlooked negative consequence of the typical change process is that it causes educators and the public to believe that meaningful educational improvement is underway in our schools when it isn't. A listing and description of all the programs they have recently introduced is one way schools and districts often use to show constituents what good things they are doing. This substitution of activity for substance is both deceptive and counterproductive for it keeps us from seeking true and lasting solutions to our educational problems.

What has been described up to this point is the current state of the scene relative to change and teachers' involvement. But the situation does not have to be as it is. Teachers need not be just passive recipients of change, they can be active initiators. And change can be a positive force for school improvement rather than a destabilizing force.

Some Facts About Teachers and Change

Before moving to a discussion of how to improve the change process it is of interest to at least note some of the things our research team has learned over the years about teachers and change. More than anything this information dispells some oft stated beliefs.

For many years as we studied change in schools across the nation we collected from individual teachers data such as their age, their gender, years of teaching experience, years of experience at that particular school and number of years of education completed. Never were we able to establish any kind of consistent relationship between these variables and outcome variables such as teachers' concerns about the particular change being implemented or their use of the innovation (George & Rutherford, 1980).

Older teachers were no more resistant to or accepting of change than were younger teachers. Neither did years of teaching experience or teacher gender predict teacher response to change. The nature of the innovation, the way the implementation process was handled and the school's previous implementation history were more influential than any of these demographic variables on teachers' concerns about and uses of an innovation.

Since we studied both elementary and secondary schools it is possible to draw some comparisons between those two levels (Hall, et. al., 1986). Admittedly these comparisons are more subjective than those just presented, but because of the numbers of schools and teachers involved in our research, and because the findings were subjected to the interpretation of our entire research team, we feel they are sound. Secondary and elementary teachers did not differ markedly in their acceptance of or resistance to change. High school teachers were more likely to seek information about the purpose, intent and rationale for a particular change. This was due in part to the fact that many of the changes they were asked to implement were directed at the

curriculum of their particular department and since they tended to believe themselves highly knowledgeable in their own teaching field, they were more apt to give the innovation a careful look. Elementary teachers, on the other hand, were asked to make changes in the many areas in which they teach, and they did not always consider themselves expert in every area. However, because secondary teachers tended to consider changes more carefully did not mean they were resistant to change. Data we collected does not support that contention (Rutherford & Murphy, 1985).

Another factor that is often discussed in connection with teachers and change is teacher ownership of the change (Fullan, 1982). It is commonly held that teachers will participate more eagerly in change if they are actively involved in the development or selection of the innovation. While there is some evidence this may be true (Little, 1981; Fullan, 1982), it is not possible to develop widespread ownership of innovations that are directed at an entire school district or even a single school if it is a large one. And many innovations are intended to be district wide or to affect one or more schools.

When the target population of teachers is so large it just is not feasible to involve every teacher extensively enough to develop within each one a sense of ownership. Instead a representative group of teachers may be selected for in-depth participation in the innovation development process, or school leaders may seek teacher input through some type of survey or other feedback mechanism. While these approaches have their value they definitely do not develop a sense of ownership in those who not were meaningfully involved in the development or implementation of an innovation. In fact, intensive involvement in innovation development does not ensure ownership. More than one teacher who served on a committee to develop a new program reported to our researchers that they had become disenchanted with the work of the committee, usually because actions

were taken with which they disagreed. Consequently, they opposed the innovation and attempted to convince fellow teachers of its unworthiness.

The point of this discussion is that developing ownership, or establishing a bottom-up change process, is very difficult and very time consuming when large numbers of people are the target of the change. Absence of teacher ownership will be an abiding problem unless the district-wide or school-wide approach to school change that has typically been employed for the past two decades is modified. It should be noted, however, that just because a change comes from the top down it is not necessarily viewed negatively by teachers (Rutherford and Murphy, 1985).

Improving the Change Process

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the merits and disadvantages of the top-down change process frequently used in educational settings. Instead I will first discuss ways to improve that process and later will discuss a viable alternative to the top-down approach.

Acceptance in Lieu of Ownership

Teachers usually represent a vital link in the change process (Vandenberghe, 1984). If they fail to use an innovation, or if they use it poorly, then there will be no productive outcomes. Thus it is absolutely essential that teachers be receptive to the change. The point has already been made that when large numbers of participants are involved, developing universal teacher ownership is not possible. It is possible, however, to create among the teaching force a large number of effective users.

This can be accomplished through the use of a systematic plan for facilitating the change that gives teachers priority consideration. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) designed at the R&DCTE offers just such a plan (Hall, Wallace & Dossett, 1973; Hord & Rutherford, 1980).

An essential first step in the CBAM is the establishment of a Game Plan (Hall & Hord, 1984; Hord & Rutherford, 1980) which lays out the strategies and tactics to be employed when implementing the change. This plan must recognize that complex change is a process that requires time. Complex innovations will likely require two or more years and then only if there is a strong staff development program to support the teachers. During this time teachers should not be expected to implement any other mandated innovations.

Included in the design of the game plan should be strategies and tactics that make it clear that the innovation is important, it will be an enduring change and that effective implementation is expected. These steps are necessary if we want to convince teachers that this innovation will not pass away and that faking its use will not be acceptable. Establishing this kind of clarity and certainty about the innovation is not intended to force or pressure teachers into innovation use. Rather it is intended to sweep away any ambiguity about the expectations of the school leaders regarding the innovation. The game plan, and its execution, should make it easy and comfortable for teachers to believe in and commit to the innovation without concern that it is just another hoax.

Setting forth the expectations for effective use of the innovation is an important feature of the game plan. But if teachers are expected to use the innovation effectively then there must be specification and clarification of "effective use." To accomplish this the CBAM recommends the determination of the Innovation Configuration for each innovation before it is introduced into the schools (Heck, Stiegelbauer, Hall & Loucks, 1981). During our years of research on school change it was rare to find a situation where all parties, developers, facilitators and teachers (users) had a clear and common understanding of exactly what was required or expected of users of the

innovation. In the absence of any common agreement of what the user was to do and how they were to do it, an innovation often became a variety of innovations as teachers applied their own interpretations to the requirements for use.

When innovation developers or facilitators first introduce an innovation to teachers it is not at all uncommon for them to tell the teachers something to this effect: "Of course, we expect you will adjust the program to fit your own classroom situation." Berman and McLaughlin (1978) have referred to this process as one of mutual adaptation. From their research they found that usually teachers made some adaptations in their practice in response to the innovation while adjusting the innovation somewhat to fit their practice.

While the practice of mutual adaptation may appear to be reasonable, it can be detrimental to the success of the innovation, and it can be frustrating to teachers when it operates without guidelines. Use of the Innovation Configuration (IC) component of the CBAM can diminish if not eliminate both of the problems associated with mutual adaptation of an innovation. IC requires that before implementation begins the developers and facilitators make precise identification of all components or expectations associated with the innovation. For example, a criterion math program may include a set of sequential objectives, supplemental teaching materials, a testing program, a record-keeping system and an instructional program that calls for individualization based on test outcomes.

Once all components of the innovation have been identified, a next step in the IC process is to decide which ones are essential to the success of the innovation. These are the components that must be used. Along with this, the latitude teachers have, if any, in adapting these components must be established. For most innovations the developers believe there are certain things that must be done, and in prescribed ways, or the intent of the

innovation has been violated. These are the essential components. In addition to the essential components there may be those that are desirable but not essential, and still others that are nice, but clearly optional.

Once the IC has been developed facilitators and teachers can have a common and consistent understanding of innovation expectations. This reduces teacher frustration or indifference that results from ambiguity about what is expected of them. It also makes it possible to know if those things users must do to make innovation succeed are indeed done, not just faked. More important, it can assist facilitators in determining the kinds of assistance teachers will need when implementing the change.

Development of the Game Plan and Innovation Configuration should occur in advance of the introduction of the innovation. As the innovation is introduced and the implementation plan executed, careful attention must be given to the individual teachers. In response to innovation implementation teachers vary individually just as students in any given classroom vary. They have different kinds of concerns about the innovation, and their actual use of it will vary. Vandenberghe (1984) and others (Fullan, 1982) have found that teachers view changes in terms of the consequences for themselves. If they perceive the innovation to be practical and of potential value, then they are more likely to give greater attention to its use. Therefore, the Game Plan and Innovation Configuration should relate the innovation to the work and needs of teachers in such a way that teachers view the change as being practical and of value.

The CBAM offers some easy-to-use procedures for assessing the Stages of Concern (Hall, George & Rutherford, 1977) teachers have about their involvement with an innovation and their Level of Use of the innovation (Loucks, Newlove & Hall, 1976). With this diagnostic information about individual teacher concerns and use of the innovation, facilitators can individualize the support

and assistance provided for teachers. When teachers do have this kind of support and assistance it enhances their acceptance of the innovation and ultimately it promotes the effectiveness of the innovation. Additionally this personalized approach to facilitation helps create a feeling in a school or district that teachers are viewed not just as passive recipients of change but as important individuals who are the essential ingredient in the change process. When teachers are made to feel an important part of the change process they are much more likely to be accepting of the innovation and willing to use it effectively.

A Different Approach

Change does not have to come from the top down and teachers do not have to be passive recipients of change. They can be developers, initiators and implementers of change. For this to happen several conditions need to exist. First, policy makers and educational leaders must accept the fact that change does not have to occur at the district or school level or among large groups of teachers to be meaningful. Second, school leaders must promote and sanction change in individual classrooms and among small groups. Of course, changes at these levels have always occurred in schools and are occurring now but they are not often actively promoted or sanctioned by the leadership of the school. As a consequence the changes that are made by individuals and small groups many times are inconsequential or they are short lived.

As a research team our most impressive demonstration of how teachers can be instrumental in change came during our two years of research on team teaching (Rutherford, 1975; Rutherford, 1979; Hall & Rutherford, 1976; Rutherford, 1977). We saw many teams where the teachers were involved in change virtually on a daily basis--change they had initiated. These teachers were constantly discussing and assessing the teaching-learning situation for

the students they served. On the basis of this collaboration they would make those adjustments they felt were necessary to better serve the learner.

The kinds of changes made by the teams were not unlike those changes typically mandated for teachers by superordinates at the district or school level. Changes made by the teams included the following: changes in curriculum; changes in the way instruction was delivered; different approaches to classroom management; changes in record keeping; changes in administrative and management procedures; changes in schedule; and changes in the assignment of themselves to particular teaching tasks. Clearly these teachers were neither resistant to nor fearful of the changes they were making. Furthermore, the changes they made were enduring. Once they initiated a change, they were committed to it and persisted in it until they believed they had an even better way of doing it.

It must be emphasized that these teaching teams were not making meaningless changes or changes intended to make their professional lives easier. On the contrary, team members spent more time in planning and preparing for teaching than many solitary teachers. This was due in part to the time spent collaborating and in part to a heightened sense of professional responsibility. Teaching teams would frequently arrange it so that one of their members could attend a professional meeting or conference or visit in another school where something of interest to the team was happening. This member would then share with the entire team what he or she had learned, and how it might be used by the team to improve their work. Team members were truly intent on becoming better and better teachers.

In addition to changes made within a team, it was not unusual for two or more teams to collaborate in the development and initiation of change. We noted this happening most in the elementary schools, but it also occurred in

secondary schools between departments. When change is initiated by teachers, how extensively and effectively it is disseminated to other teachers is determined to a great extent by the degree of support and sanction the leadership of the school gives to the change (Huling-Austin, Stiegelbauer & Muscella, 1985; Rutherford, Hord, Huling-Austin & Hall, 1982; Hall, Rutherford, Hord & Huling-Austin, 1984).

What we learned from our study of team teaching, and what others have learned since that time (Little, 1981; Fullan, 1982), is that teachers can and will be effective agents for change when conditions are right. Consequently, we would recommend that school leaders give much greater emphasis to the promotion and support of teachers as change agents. Certainly the cost is less than all the failed efforts to implement widespread mandated changes and the potential for enduring improvement of the teaching and learning process in schools is greater.

Concluding Comments

From years of research in public schools it is evident that school leaders believe (as evidenced by their practice) that the best way to bring about school improvement is through changes mandated by superordinates and directed at entire districts or schools or some other large unit within the district. Unfortunately, the available evidence indicates that this approach to change has not been very successful. The enduring improvements that have occurred in American public schools as a result of the myriad of changes that have been introduced during the past 25-30 years are hard to find. Much money, much time and much professional effort has left a very paltry legacy.

One major reason for the failure or minimal success of many change efforts is the fact that teachers have been treated as passive recipients of change. Change after change has been introduced into schools with little or no serious

consultation with all teachers involved, and with little preparation, training and support for the changes. In spite of this, it has been assumed that teachers would know exactly what they were supposed to do and would do it.

This paper suggests two ways this serious flaw in current change practices might be eliminated. The first calls for an improvement in these change practices, an improvement that acknowledges the critical importance of teachers in the process and treats them accordingly. To do this it is recommended that the Concerns-Based Adoption Model be used to guide the change process. This model gives highest priority to the individual teacher and his/her needs in relation to any change effort.

A second way to improve the change process is to establish conditions within the organization that encourage teachers to become the initiators and facilitators of change. When this occurs teachers have a commitment and excitement to change that eliminates many of the difficulties associated with the top-down approach to change. If this is to occur, school leaders must first encourage teachers individually and collectively to develop their own changes. This done, the leaders must sanction their efforts and provide the support needed to maintain the change. Finally, if it is desired that the change be disseminated to other teachers, it must be facilitated by someone(s) who is skilled as a facilitator, which means they must be trained to serve in this role. School leaders, even good ones, are not automatically qualified as effective change facilitators.

Teachers are the essential element in change regardless of the process that is followed. Unless their importance is recognized and respected, change in American schools will remain more fiction than fact.